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SIPDIS

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SUBJECT: TRAFFICKING IN PERSONS CONFERENCE IN MEXICO LAYS
OUT CHALLENGES AHEAD

¶1. (SBU) Summary: With support from U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE), Mexico's National Commission for Human Rights (CNDH) and the International Organization for Migration (IOM) sponsored a comprehensive conference on trafficking in persons (TIP) in Tapachula, Chiapas, June 14-15. Speakers and attendees ranged from high-level Mexican federal officials to the directors of local shelters, and included persons from both Mexico and Guatemala as well as abroad. The conference succeeded in its objective of bringing together experts, provoking frank discussion of trafficking, and establishing a network among officials and academics. While these steps will contribute to building a stronger coalition among government and civil society, Mexico needs to build on this momentum and take the necessary action reflected in the consensus of the experts who participated in this conference. End Summary.

A Well-Attended Event with Frank Discussion

¶2. (U) On June 14 and 15, Poloff attended a conference on TIP sponsored by CNDH and IOM in Tapachula, which drew more than 200 attendees. These included the Governor of Chiapas, representatives of the Attorney General's office (PGR), state and federal offices of CNDH, the Mexican and Guatemalan police, local NGOs, international consultancies, law schools, and international organizations. U.S. attendees also included ICE, USAID, and DOJ. The setting of the conference in a border city established a sense of immediacy: this particular corner of Mexico is a bustling crossing point for migrants, weak on law enforcement, and extremely vulnerable to trafficking.

¶3. (U) CNDH President Dr. Jose Luis Soberanes Fernandez spoke of his organization's (first) official TIP complaint made recently against two branches of government and involving two Chinese workers in a Guanajuato factory. Soberanes is a well-known figure in Mexico, and the CNDH, according to national opinion polls, is one of the country's most respected institutions. Chiapas Attorney General Mariano Herran Salvatti described state reforms carried out to address TIP (although legal experts mentioned afterwards that Chiapas still lacks the necessary legal framework).

¶4. (U) Speakers detailed the challenges facing Mexico (documented in the 2006 TIP Report), including: the lack of a federal law against trafficking; insufficient awareness and sensitivity among the general public; corruption and impunity among authorities; and the increasing size and sophistication of criminal organizations and the clandestine nature of trafficking. Jose Luis Santiago Vasconcelos, chief of the PGR's organized crime unit, bluntly stated Mexico has a long way to go in fighting TIP. He noted the lack of a federal

TIP law and national strategy and poor interagency cooperation. Vasconcelos reiterated his commitment to overcoming these challenges. The experts often agreed on remedies, which included passage of the Senate-approved TIP legislation now pending in the lower house of Congress; police training, including victim identification; social services to victims, including medical, social and psychological assistance; and voluntary repatriation or reintegration into society, including training and economic opportunities. Many of these remedies are in place in various programs in the country: the special federal police investigative task force established with help from ICE; an integrated victims assistance program in Nuevo Leon; IOM shelter and social services; and USAID-sponsored judicial reform efforts.

The Other Border

15. (U) Following the conference, a Mexican immigration official took Poloff on a tour of the nearby Mexico-Guatemala border. While the formal crossing point was bustling with activity, the real commercial enterprise seemed to be located downstream. Using rafts made of inner tubes and plywood, merchants moved foodstuffs across the river in a do-it-yourself free trade zone. Federal authorities watched but did not interfere. According to the Mexican official, a few kilometers farther downstream Central American (as well as Brazilian and Cuban) migrants regularly cross into Mexico. Once past the river, they walk north along the railroad tracks until they can hop a train or find other means of transportation north. Immigration officials detain or otherwise encounter about 500 migrants a day in the Tapachula region but seemed sure a significantly larger number of

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migrants were actually moving through the area. It is common for migrants to be killed or injured jumping the trains. Rape and robbery are also common perils.

Comment

16. (SBU) This was a successful conference and owed much to the support provided by ICE. Participants highlighted effective programs now in place as well as spelling out the challenges Mexico must overcome to better combat trafficking. Key among these is clearly the passage of the pending federal TIP legislation. Traffickers can now only be prosecuted on TIP-related crimes, such as corruption of minors. Passage of a comprehensive federal law would not only provide the legal tools but would increase public awareness of the problem and send the message that TIP is not to be tolerated. We will continue our efforts to encourage congressional action on this important measure.

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GARZA